DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL EDWARD KORNISH, COMMANDER, REGIONAL POLICE ADVISORY COMMAND VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM AFGHANISTAN
TIME: 8:30 A.M. EST DATE: FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 2008

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Well, Colonel, if you're ready, we can go ahead and get started. If others join us, we can add them in as they come along.

COL. KORNISH: Okay. I'm ready. I appreciate those of you that are on taking the interest to join us and to take the time to talk with me.

I'm Colonel Ed Kornish. Last name is with a "K"; otherwise, like the chicken. (Audio break.) (In progress following audio break) -- here in our region to help turn them into a more professional force of policemen that are trusted and respected by the Afghan people.

And I guess one of the first things I would say is that all of the soldiers, sailors and airmen that we have here in our region are doing a heck of a job. This is one of the higher-risk areas in Afghanistan, and our guys operate under pretty austere conditions. Most of them are volunteers, not all, but even those that are not volunteers are doing a heck of a job.

And up front I would say that we're making slow but steady progress with the Afghan police. Obviously, several years behind the efforts that we have made with the Afghan National Army, and they're probably the most respected force in the country, but we are bringing the police along.

Our region is one of five in Afghanistan -- Central, East, South -- where we are, West, and North. And our regions correspond with Afghan National Army -- ANA -- corps areas. Ours is the 205th Hero Corps. They're also aligned with the regional police commands.

Personally, I've been in the Army 29 years. I'm an MP, military policeman. I'm a traditional Guardsman or citizen soldier. Back home I've been a prosecutor for 18 years, volunteered to come to Afghanistan to do this mission, and I feel blessed and fortunate that I'm able to use my skill set and do something for the folks of Afghanistan.

We have in our region six provinces -- Nimroz, Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul and Oruzgan and Daikundi.

We have coalition forces in four of those. Nimroz in the west, we don't. Daikundi, way up north in our region, we don't. So the four areas we're

in are: Helmand, where we work with the -- primarily the British; Kandahar, where we work primarily with the Canadians; Zabul, where we work primarily with the Romanians; and Oruzgan, where we work with the Dutch.

We have U.S. police mentor teams across those four provinces, and I have 15 district level teams -- a district would basically be comparable to a county back home. Those teams are 12 to 16 man teams. We run three to four up-armored humvees. Our coalition partners refer to our humvees as "little tanks", and we think they are. We've had a number of them attacked, blown up, and guys have walked away from every one of those. They are very survivable and give us a lot of confidence. We also have in our area six Canadian police mentor teams, they're all in the Kandahar area, and then six U.K. or British teams over in the Helmand area. We work with them to mentor and train the Afghan National Police.

It's a challenge -- why? Because historically, probably -- what, 300 -- out of the last 300 years, there's been about four years of relative peace in Afghanistan. The people here suffered dramatically, obviously, when the Russians were here, and even more so when the Taliban ran the country. The existing structure of the government and the infrastructure is not very robust. And based on their history and what the folks that we deal with have grown up with, there's a certain amount of dysfunction, individually and within the culture, just in coping and surviving with what they've had in the best.

On the positive side, Afghans are very courageous people, great fighters. Most of the guys that we're working with, especially the senior police leadership, are honest, they're dedicated to making their country a safer place for themselves, for their kids and for their grandkids. And my take on it, anyway, is that they want the same thing our folks do our country. they want their kids to be able to go out and play. They want to be able to go to school. They want to be able to get a job and have hope for the future, and that's something that we helped the Afghan government and the Afghan police bring to them -- something that the Taliban and the insurgency doesn't. Our take on it is that the insurgents -- Taliban pervert Islam to their own personal gain. A lot of them are just simply criminals. They prey on the fear and ignorance of the people. And one of the keys to the future and to security is also education. So we -- in addition to working with the police, we also work with -- within our own military channels and other government agencies and nongovernment agencies to fund humanitarian assistance visits. We go out into local villages and do medical assistance visits. We help them get water wells put in, so they have water. A lot of these are small, local projects, but we also work with USAID to get schools and roads built. And a lot of us, on an individual basis, have contacts back home or we have churches and folks that we know gathering up humanitarian assistance -- just like gloves and hats and school -- supplies that when we go out and visit the villages we take and give out, in terms of donations from folks back home.

And with the poverty that folks have here, virtually anything we take is very well appreciated. So thanks to all the people back home that do send stuff over here.

How are we doing? On the police side, I think we're making progress, and it's through a variety of things. One is reforming the leadership. And that's been an ongoing process which primarily is run by the Afghan Ministry of Interior, which is over the police. They also work with UNAMA.

And essentially what they've done is they've gone through an objective -- tests, evaluations of existing leadership. They've eliminated some of the corrupt leaders and replaced them with more honest, more capable leaders. And like I said, the reform leaders that we deal with tend to be very honest, very competent people. They're doing the right thing for their country.

Another area that we've improved again, together with the Afghans, is reforming the pay for the Afghan police, because up until the last couple months, the police in this country were paid less than what the army was paid. The police also -- and I'll talk about a little bit -- face more danger typically than the army soldiers do because of their deployment, training and everything else, but they were making less. So it was tough to recruit for the police when you could go take a job with less risk and get more money.

We've equalized that by working with the Afghans. The actual pay now doesn't seem like much back home, it's about $100 a month, but unfortunately, that's a significant amount here in this country and enough for most of them to survive and support their families.

Also as part of the leadership, getting rid of bad, corrupt leaders, but also bad, corrupt police, which is an ongoing process, in their places recruiting better, more honest police that are loyal to the national government and have more loyalty to the national government than they do to their tribe.

We provide, obviously, better training and mentoring, and better tactics and police. I'd also mention that we work with the civilian police. DynCorp has probably over 500 civilian police, primarily from the United States, many of them retired, that come over here under contract, and they work with us on the police side of it. And we also have from a number of NATO countries civilian police officers. The Canadians have Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and they are embedded with us. There's Germans up north. There's British in our area. And we work together as a team, both the military and the civilian police.

And then lastly, which is one of our big dollar items, is providing better equipment to the police in terms of weapons and vehicles and communications gear.

I'm sorry?

MR. HOLT: No, sir; go ahead.

COL. KORNISH: Okay. I mentioned before that the Afghans bear the brunt of the insurgency. We have had, in our region alone, which typically -- I think about 60 percent of the enemy-related or insurgent-related activity is in our region; 40 percent is in the rest of the country. But most of those attacks are targeted against either civilians or to our local Afghan police. We've had hundreds of police killed this year, unfortunately.

And I think the reason, or one of the reasons, that the Taliban target the police, or the insurgents target the police, is because the police tend to be more spread out in all the villages and all the rural areas. They tend to be in smaller groups than the army or the coalition forces. We have them out on checkpoints in groups of six to 12, whereas generally when the coalition and the Army roll, we're rolling at least in platoon size, 30 guys and a fairly heavy target. The police don't have any armored vehicles and they don't really have heavy weapons. I mean, they have machine guns. But typically they

are seen as a weaker, less-armed force, more dispersed, so they get targeted a lot.

Our training, our equipping is helping with that, and also the tactics. We have a strategic program that we developed in our region that's kind of been adopted country-wide, which we call checkpoint consolidation -- rationalization and consolidation. For instance, in Zabul, a province which is one of our provinces, along Highway 1, which is the main corridor around the country, there were between 26 and 33 static checkpoints six months ago. We have worked with the Afghans and convinced them that they can have better security and better survivability of their police and provide their citizens better security by consolidating those into six checkpoints and in two police stations, for a total of eight, and they're more defensible in terms of protecting the police, plus in terms of tactics, we encourage them to get away from static checkpoints and get out and patrol and get into the community and do community policing. And that's obviously something we've done in the States much more effectively and it's also effective over here.

And the citizens in that area where we've initiated that program have been very positive with their feedback on the success of the program. It's an ongoing program. And it also ties into a new strategic initiative we just started that came out of CSTC-A, General Cone, which is focused district development, or FDD, and I'll talk a little bit about that. But basically, because the police bear the brunt of the insurgency, they're targeted. We're working with them.

It's probably more challenging than working with the army, and a lot of my guys who came over here to train the Afghan army and to mentor with them that are infantry, combat arms background, have found the police mentoring job to be actually more challenging and more robust because of where the police are deployed. And not only do we train and mentor the police, but we -- the guys that we mentor, we go out on missions with and do operations. And while I've said that there's been hundreds of police -- Afghan police killed in our region, there's been thousands of Taliban and insurgents killed during that same period. And if you want a ratio, I think if you look at the numbers, it's probably we kill 10 of them for every one of us that gets killed. We'd just as soon not lose any of ours, but they suffer disproportionately when they fight us. And I think the Taliban and the insurgents are learning that the police are not nearly as weak as targets or as easy targets as they were six to seven months ago. So we've seen some improvements.

The focused district development is basically, I guess, in a nutshell a concept where we put replacement police into an entire district, we pull all of the normally assigned policemen out of that district and we send them to one of our police academies for 60 days.

And we train them as a group, and we actually have three concurrent courses. One is for policemen who have never been to the basic academy, which is an eight-week course, there's another advanced course which is eight weeks for those that have basic police qualifications. And then we have a separate track for leaders. And we keep them all together, train them as a group and then put them back into the community.

We have a lot of hope. And again, we started that program end of December, so we're going through our first cycle now. We will return back to Zabul province at the end of February over 300 police that have trained as a unit, and then we will start in a couple of our districts in Kandahar with our

next cycle, which will actually start at the beginning of March. So it's -- initially it's very encouraging, the progress that we're making there.

I guess in summary, I would say that although it's challenging, that it's also rewarding and that we've seen good steady process the whole time we've been here, and that we think we're making a difference for the people of Afghanistan and they much prefer our company to the -- as the Taliban.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Well, thank you very much. Let's see. Chuck, you were first online, so why don't you -- why don't you get us started here?

Q Good afternoon, sir. Chuck --

COL. KORNISH: Good afternoon.

Q -- Simmins from America's North Shore --

COL. KORNISH: Sorry.

Q -- Journal. A couple of -- a numeric question and a kind of an explanation question. How many Afghan police are we talking about? And could you explain or maybe come up with an analogy here in the States as to what the Afghan National Police equate to? State troopers, National Guard -- you know, that kind of thing?

COL. KORNISH: Yes, sir, as best I can. We're talking about in our region about 10,000 Afghan police officers that are actually authorized. But more than that, there are authorized in our region about 16,000, but because of the level of hostility and the threat in our area -- a lot of the police that are recruited are recruited from the north and the east, where there's not as much activity and there's no deployment pay or combat pay. So a police officer that works north of Kabul or in the northern part of the country, where it's a little more peaceful than down here and not as high risk, makes the same amount of money as a policeman that comes down here and faces a lot more risk. So we're about 6,000 officers short, and that's an ongoing challenge that we're working with, in terms of numbers.

In terms of the numbers of guys that I have to work with in this region on the military side, I have about 230 guys and gals, soldiers, sailors and airmen that are part of the police command. The British at -- with their 16, probably another 70 folks. And the Canadians have close to 100 that are dedicated to police missions.

In terms of the comparison to something back in the States, there's no real good comparison. This is a national police force. And one of the things that -- all of those efforts I've talked about in terms of leadership and recruiting and getting rid of the corrupt guys is -- the senior leadership of the Afghan police and the Afghan government agree with us that one of the keys to future success for the police is to recruit a more nationally oriented police force. Many of the police that we're -- we inherited were basically raised like local militia, and sometimes they have loyalties stronger to their tribe than they do to the nation, and that's something that we're working to overcome.

So, I would say the force that we have, to equate it to something we have back home, because it's -- it makes, in our area, somewhat of a paramilitary force -- would be a combination of military police from the

National Guard and state police, kind of a composite force that has characteristics of both of those. And quality is improving, but there is no other police force. I mean, there is one police force, which is Afghan National Police. There's not like a city police force or a county police force -- all of the district police are part of the Afghan National Police.

They have different types. They have some police that are dedicated to the border, and they have what's called ANCOP or Afghan National Civil Order Police, which are kind of like a QRF -- a quick reaction force, a SWAT team back home -- and they operate more as units that are probably more comparable to an army unit than they are to a police unit. But most of the police -- 90 percent of the police in Afghanistan are part of the Afghan National Police, and they're uniform police. One single force.

Q Thank you.

COL. KORNISH: Does that answer your question?

Q Yes, sir.

COL. KORNISH: Okay. MR. HOLT: Okay.

Scott?

Q Good morning, Colonel. This is Scott Kesterson with KGW.com and director of the film "At War."

COL. KORNISH: Good morning.

Q When I left Afghanistan last spring, the ANP mission was just getting stood up. And at that time, the funding was extremely limited, including to the point that DynCorp was covering a lot of the basic costs, which is food and housing. Can you talk a bit about that?

COL. KORNISH: I think we're still operating outside of the budget cycle, and we're getting better. We have not been fully recognized and built into the system, in terms of this mission. We've had a number of important folks come and visit us recently -- the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the chief of staff of the Army, the CENTCOM commander, sergeant major. And they understand what the requirement is now better. I think we understand better what our requirement is for forces and for equipment and for money.

And I think that within the next six months, we are going to be a recognized force within the budget cycle. And I think things are going to get a lot better during the second half of this year than they have been. We've been operating really from out of hide, with resources that were dedicated to training the Afghan national police. And our folks -- that's in part why they've operated under such austere conditions. But I think it's getting better, and I think within the next six months, we'll be well.

Q Thank you.

COL. KORNISH: Yes, sir.

MR. HOLT: All right, okay, so Chuck, anything else, or Scott?

Q Yeah, sure.

Taking the military component out, I've been curious, both in Iraq and in Afghanistan. How much actual police work, in a traditional sense of the word, is involved for these fellows, versus, you know, getting shot at by the Taliban?

COL. KORNISH: In our area, and I can only speak for our area, I think in areas with a little less risk and more stability, it's probably different. But in our area, the majority of the police work that is done now is more along the lines of a paramilitary force fighting the insurgency. There is some limited amount of police investigations, but we don't have anybody out writing speeding tickets or enforcing too many traffic regulations in our area; we're kind of in a survival mode now.

We think that over time as the security situation gets better, which it's gradually doing in our area, that there will be a shift in our efforts. And although we teach them and train them both on military-type survival skills and police skills -- like, you know, going to a crime scene and how to investigate and collect evidence and all that -- that it's probably a few years down the road before they switch over where they're doing more police work than they are paramilitary work, if that helps to answer.

Q Yes, sir.

Q Colonel, this is Scott. One of the challenges I know you mentioned and you're going to continue to face is the salary base, which keeps them from being cross-recruited. I know that through last year, the (Taliban ?) were offering $400 to $500 a month up in Gardez, and as much as $750 a month down in the regions of Helmand, where your main drug trafficking is. The salary increase you mentioned is $100 a month, was a pretty significant increase, but what do you think is going to keep the retention, from having these soldiers (jump the line when it's bad ?).

COL. KORNISH: I think part of it is improvements in the leadership, being part of a more professional organization. And I think some of it are personnel policies that are still being developed, where, I mean, if a kid is from the northern part of the country, he will be able to be assigned down here for -- he'll know, okay, he's going to be down here for a year or two and then he's going to get a chance to go back home. We haven't gotten to that point yet, but I think those kind of programs are going to be developed.

And the fact that we are doing better against the insurgency, your chances of surviving as a policeman are a heck of a lot better than if you are on the other side. And actually in our area the Taliban are paying more a month than we are in some places because their life expectancy is much shorter.

Q That makes sense.

Now, you just added something, if I can continue here real quickly. You mentioned the option to go home after two years. I was under the impression the MP mission was being fabricated or designed around the idea of keeping it local-local, so that your mission as a local militia was started from a village, and it was local people accustomed to being in the village that stayed there.

COL. KORNISH: Yeah, and I want to -- I want to be clear that what I was talking about is not something that they have enacted. It's something that

has been discussed in terms of, you know, having a specific period of time that you would be assigned to this area before you got to go back home.

I can tell you, as a practical effect, we have a mix of policemen here. Some of them are from the local area. And depending on what part of the region you go to, I mean, you get a size -- 90 percent of the guys are from a local area, and you go to other areas and it's maybe half and half -- half from the local area and half from outside. I think over time you will see the trend go towards more of a mixed national force and kind of away from the local militia because with a mixed -- more of a national force you have more allegiance to the national government than to the local area.

Q All right, that makes sense.

COL. KORNISH: Does that make sense?

Q Yeah it does, very much, thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anything else?

Q I have actually one more question before we finish, Jack, so whenever you're --

MR. HOLT: Okay. Sure, go ahead.

Q Colonel, you mentioned also that part of the MP mission, as an extension of it, was the border mission, and that's something that I'm going to be probably returning to Afghanistan within this next year to cover. Can you speak -- do you have any touch with that part of the mission at all?

(No response.)

Q Hello? MR. HOLT: Hello?

Q Hello.

MR. HOLT: Colonel, are you still with us?

Q Yeah, I'm here. Can you hear me, Jack?

MR. HOLT: Yeah, I got you.

Q I think we lost the colonel.

MR. HOLT: I think we did.

Q I think that beeping might have been his satellite kicking in.

MR. HOLT: Oh. Yeah, you know, it may have been. (Laughs.)

Q (Laughs.) I recognize that (sound ?) from when I was over there.

MR. HOLT: I didn't even think about that.

Q Satellites, why do they hate us? (Laughs.)

MR. HOLT: Yeah.

Q I recognized that. I was wondering what that beep was, and I remember when I was over there that was one of those nasty little tones you didn't want to hear in satellite --

MR. HOLT: Yeah. I didn't -- yeah, okay. Yeah. They probably had 30 minutes' satellite time and that was -- that just finished it.

Q Yeah, I think that's probably right.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Well, I'll tell you what. If you want to -- if you want to write that up and send me an e-mail on it --

Q Sure, I'll do that, I'll get it to you a little bit later here this morning.

MR. HOLT: I'll forward it on. I'll forward it on to him and we'll go from there.

Q That's super. I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Well, I appreciate you guys joining us for the bloggers roundtable this morning.

Q Absolutely, well, thank you. Q Thank you for the opportunity, very interesting.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Q And I'll keep you posted on this other -- on the progress of the film. So we'll -- it's moving along.

MR. HOLT: Okay, great. I'm looking forward to it.

Q All right.

Q Have a good day, Jack.

Q All right, Jack.

Q Okay. Thanks, Jack. Talk to you later.

END.